

Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today on House Bill 5489: An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform.

My name is Dawn Marchand and I am currently a Graduate student at the UCONN School of Social Work. I am here today to register my support for this bill as part of the Department of Education's plan to raise academic standards and to create a stronger connection between the state's secondary school curriculum and the life skills necessary for self sufficiency.

Specifically I am here to advocate on behalf of the section (c)(3)(B) requiring 1 credit of comprehensive health education for graduation.

Self care is a critical aspect of self sufficiency and our young people face a myriad of challenges to securing long-term health for themselves. Chief among these challenges is maintaining sexual health. The statistics on sexually transmitted infection rates and unintended pregnancies speak for themselves; our youth population is taking unnecessary risks and the ramifications can have lifelong reproductive, general health and financial implications.

I am currently interning with an adolescent girls group, and can state unequivocally that these young women are being bombarded by media messages about sex. Sex in song lyrics, sex on reality TV, sex on the web, sex in the news; and most of the messages they are taking in suggest that sex is about desire that transcends clear thinking. These messages are certainly not new, but the escalation of exposure to these messages, and the corresponding pressures, necessitate a comprehensive education based campaign to increase adolescent sexual self efficacy (the belief in one's ability to exercise influence over events that affect their lives).

*Healthy Teens Connecticut* defines comprehensive sex education as "responsible and balanced sexuality education that seeks to: assist young people in understanding a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information and skills about caring for their sexual health, and help them acquire skills to make decisions now and in the future. It is medically accurate and provides information about abstinence and contraceptives as tools to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)." And research shows that teenagers who receive sex education that includes discussion of contraception are more likely than those who receive abstinence-only messages to delay sexual activity and to use contraceptives when they do become sexually active.

I hope the Committee will agree that the potential benefits to lifelong health that comprehensive health education offers far outweighs the cost of administering such programs, and will support adding Connecticut to the roster of states (currently 36) that require a health education credit before high school graduation

Please support comprehensive sex education programs for CT youth by supporting HB 5489 An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform requiring a graduation requirement of 1 credit in comprehensive health education.

Thank you very much for your time.